CE PRESIDENT NIXON'S WAR

prepared by:

RESIDENT KENNEDY'S WAR

SACC vol.3 no.1

RESIDENT JOHNSON'S WA

RESIDENT NIXON'S WAR

The Wa

Indochina

· · · doug Fab. (?) 1971

Nixon's Strategy in S.E. Asia Daniel Ellsber

Richard Nixon, like Kennedy and Johnson before him, believes he cannot hold the White House for a second term unless he holds Saigon through his first.

His two predecessors had seen the leaders of an earlier Democratic administration hounded from office to the cry that they had 'lost China to Communism." Kennedy and Johnson feared that the charge of their losing Vietnam' could rally again the hounds of McCarthyism against their party.

But Nixon does not feel immune just because he once was one of the leaders of that pack. On the contrary. He knows, better than anyone, just what he would do with that hunting cry if he were on the outside, even against a Republican President. He is determined not to have to confront it, either from Reagan summoning away his supporters in the convention, or from Wallace

calling to his voters in the election.

So once again our Southeast Asian policy is dominated -- as it has been since 1961-- by the President's need to hold power both in Washington and in Saigon, LBJ's strategy -- to hold Saigon with half a million U.S. troops -failed; it saved Saigon but lost Washington. Nixon drew the obvious lesson. (Indeed, the Nixon Administration has been far better at drawing tactical lessons from the mistakes of the Democrats and from its own errors than the Democrats ever were at learning from their own experience, or the French). U.S. troop levels -- and U.S. casualties, draft calls, budget costs, and news-space on the war -- had to go down.

A negotiated settlement? Within the first few months of 1969, it was evident in Paris that Hanoi and the NLF would not accept terms that would meet the Administration's needs for assuring non-Communist control in Saigon through 1973 (or better, 1977). Thus the war must go on, but with fewer US troops. On the other hand, U.S. military advisors have never held out any hope whatever that Saigon could be held with no U.S. forces in South Vietnam. Thus, both U.S. troops and airpower were needed; the fewer troops in

South Vietnam, the more airpower throughout Indochina.

In fact, while the political ceiling on troops was surely not above half the 1969 level, the military floor seemed not much below that... So far as is known, the highest military authorities have never judged that the job could be done, with reasonable assurance and with adequate safety for remaining U.S. troops, with less than a couple of hundred thousand U.S. military personnel in the country, on tasks including air support, logistics, communications, intelligence, self-defense, and strategic reserve. But a level that high, or even half that size (probably the bare minimum) could be acceptable to the public - could be kept off the front pages and out of the public conscious ness- only if U.S. casualties were very low and North Vietnamese successes anywhere in Indochina almost non-existent. One more Tet offensive, even if it failed, would be too many. Likewise, a North Vietnamese takeover in Laos: always seen as a vulnerability of the "Vietnamization" concept. (North Vietnamese takeover of much of Cambodia was not foreseen as another risk, until U.S. policy had helped make it a reality). Thus the burden on U.S. airpower was great: to susbstitute for U.S. troops, to prevent U.S. losses, Communist advances, and even dramatic Communist offensives.

Nixon gambled that airpower would do the job. In the short run, armed helicopters would keep things quiet in South Vietnam. Expanded bombing in Laos and Cambodia would at least delay an enemy buildup or help "spoil" offensives. After Sihanouk's ouster, ground operations against Cambodian Laotian and North Vietnamese bases and forces in Cambodia could be added to these efforts; here again, U.S. air support was the critical element, in

inducing the participation of South Vietnamese forces.

The next logical step would be the use of the same combination against the more important North Vietnamese "sanctuaries" in Laos; this seems to

be beginning as this goes to press.

The next step after that would be the mining and aerial destruction of the port of Haiphong in North Vietnam, along with attacks on the land and water communications to China. These would be pictured as closing the last remaining doors for the flow of war materiel to Communist-led forces in South Vietnam. About the same time, if the spoiling operations in Laos and Cambodia had seemed successful -- particularly, in escaping condemnation in the U.S. -- the team of Vietnamese ground forces and U.S. air might be used against North Vietnamese depots and bases above the DMZ: i.e., a "small" ground invasion of North Vietnam. (The deterrent threat of nuclear weapons is implicit, as always, against Chinese Communist intervention in response to any of these moves, e.g. to the invasion of Laos.) All this to

and to "protect the lives our remaining tr

But what is ultimately to prevent Hano casualties, from launching offensives aga es? Again, airpower: this time, in a puni of massive attack on North Vietnam has b pillar of the Nixon Administration's Vietn

Why should such a threat succeed, wh bombing under Johnson failed to deter or in Nixon's view, the Democrats had never bombing. What he was talking about would saturation bombing of the sorts of targets tary chiefs and their political spokesmen: communications with China. Second, the ive because it could be carried out withou port in the US.. Johnson had lost his beca with an excessive ground troop commitme one, requiring mobilization of reserves. public would accept a continued and even ried out primarily from the air.

If deterrence were to work, the North that belief. That meant demonstrations: of theater of air operations, and of the publi

Thus the sequence of public threats an strating that Nixon would not be bound by son's "pressures." The bombing of Camb pansion of bombing in Laos. A series of t even thinner and broader pretexts, leadin principle, of the bombing cessation of No bodia. A ground incursion deep into North under news blackout -- to be commencing ported invasion of Laos.

All of these have been most significant leaders of what they can expect if they chi American occupation of South Vietnam (th tration have taken to describing it). Warn and of what he can get away with domestic gress. Cambodia, of course, was a partithe Administration learned from it. The ' est Administration officials, was: Don't u side South Vietnam, either against Indoch college students, and above all, not again Laos is invaded, whether next week or so er effort to observe these constraints.

At home, in the shorter run, Nixon's less visible while expanding it geographic costs and casualties are going down, larg the great majority, seem likely to remain This means their accepting Nixon's defini ing down, "ignoring as relevant to politics going up: U.S. air operations throughout 1 side South Vietnam by Vietnamese troops the U.S. and with U.S. combat air suppor in casualties and refugees in Cambodia an

But will the strategy work in Indochina ter-century suggests overwhelmingly that deter the North Vietnamese or the revolut Laos or Cambodia. Richard Nixon and He be proven precisely as wrongheaded as ea otherwise. But that may be only after mil thousands more dead in Indochina, and ma dead, have paid the price of the Administi tions unless... Unless Americans -- first : change their perception of the war, and A Indochina, and the responsibility of citizen leaders, for that impact... Unless they re and the Administration to acknowledge the the lives we have lost nor the lives we have whatever to determine by firepower who s

in S.E. Asia Daniel Ellsberg

son before him, believes he cannot iless he holds Saigon through his

ders of an earlier Democratic ady that they had "lost China to Comat the charge of their losing Vietarthyism against their party. cause he once was one of the leadws, better than anyone, just what he in the outside, even against a Reto have to confront it, either from 1 the convention, or from Wallace

cy is dominated -- as it has been ld power both in Washington and in ith half a million U.S. troops --. Nixon drew the obvious lesson. n far better at drawing tactical lesand from its own errors than the gir own experience, or the French). draft calls, budget costs, and

st few months of 1969, it was evid not accept terms that would meet on-Communist control in Saigon ar must go on, but with fewer US advisors have never held out any ith no U.S. forces in South Vietr were needed; the fewer troops in nout Indochina.

oops was surely not above half the nuch below that... So far as is ve never judged that the job could ith adequate safety for remaining ndred thousand U.S. military perir support, logisties, communicategic reserve. But a level that are minimum) could be acceptable iges and out of the public conscious w and North Vietnamese successes it. One more Tet offensive, even a North Vietnamese takeover in

"Vietnamization" concept. (North was not foreseen as another risk, ity). Thus the burden on U.S. airroops, to prevent U.S. losses. lommunist offensives.

he job. In the short run, armed h Vietnam. Expanded bombing in enemy buildup or help "spoil" d operations against Cambodian orces in Cambodia could be added ort was the critical element, in ese forces.

of the same combination against ictuaries" in Laos; this seems to

ining and aerial destruction of the vith attacks on the land and water

to Communist-led forces in spoiling operations in Laos and darly, in escaping condemnation

and to "protect the lives our remaining troops."

But what is ultimately to prevent Hanoi, if it is willing to take the heavy casualties, from launching offensives against the reduced level of U.S. forces? Again, airpower: this time, in a punitive, deterrent role. The threat of massive attack on North Vietnam has been, from the beginning, a crucial

pillar of the Nixon Administration's Vietnam strategy.

Why should such a threat succeed, when the actual practice of massive bombing under Johnson failed to deter or prevent the Tet offensive? Because, in Nixon's view, the Democrats had never threatened or used heavy enough bombing. What he was talking about would be, in contrast, "decisive," i.e., saturation bombing of the sorts of targets long proposed by some U.S. military chiefs and their political spokesmen: Haiphong, Hanoi, the dikes, the communications with China. Second, the threat would be credible and effective because it could be carried out without destroying Nixon's political support in the US.. Johnson had lost his because he had combined air attacks with an excessive ground troop commitment and the prospect of a greater one, requiring mobilization of reserves. Nixon judged that the American public would accept a continued and even geographically-expanded war carried out primarily from the air.

If deterrence were to work, the North Vietnamese would have to share that belief. That meant demonstrations: of Nixon's willingness to expand the

theater of air operations, and of the public's willingness to let him.

Thus the sequence of public threats and offensive actions, each one demonstrating that Nixon would not be bound by the restraints that limited Johnson's "pressures." The bombing of Cambodia in the spring of 1970. The expansion of bombing in Laos. A series of bombing raids in North Vietnam on even thinner and broader pretexts, leading to the virtual abandonment in principle, of the bombing cessation of November, 1968. The invasion of Cambodia. A ground incursion deep into North Vietnam. And what appears-under news blackout -- to be commencing as this is written: the U.S. -supported invasion of Laos.

All of these have been most significant as warnings to North Vietnamese leaders of what they can expect if they challenge the indefinitely-prolonged American occupation of South Vietnam (the "Korean solution," as Administration have taken to describing it). Warnings of what Nixon is willing to do, and of what he can get away with domestically, even without consulting Congress. Cambodia, of course, was a partial failure in that last respect; but the Administration learned from it. The "Lesson of Cambodia," to the highest Administration officials, was: Don't use American troops offensively outside South Vietnam, either against Indochinese or against white American college students, and above all, not against both at the same time. When Laos is invaded, whether next week or sometime later, we can expect greater effort to observe these constraints.

At home, in the shorter run, Nixon's gamble that he could make the war less visible while expanding it geographically will succeed. So long as U.S. costs and casualties are going down, large parts of the U.S. public, perhaps the great majority, seem likely to remain passive with respect to protest. This means their accepting Nixon's definition of "the war" as "what is trending down, " ignoring as relevant to politics and concern what is meanwhile going up: U.S. air operations throughout Indochina, ground operations out side South Vietnam by Vietnamese troops equipped, financed and supplied by the U.S. and with U.S. combat air support, and the resulting vast increases in casualties and refugees in Cambodia and Laos.

But will the strategy work in Indochina? The experience of the last quarter-century suggests overwhelmingly that it will fail: fail to discourage or deter the North Viotnamaga on the navalutions in fi

ULLI III IVIIII VIELIAMESE UI IIIE IEVOIULIONARY TORCES IN SOUTH VIEtnam,
Laos or Cambodia. Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger are almost sure to
be proven precisely as wrongheaded as each of their predecessors in hoping
otherwise. But that may be only after millions more refugees, hundreds of
thousands more dead in Indeahine 1 1 11

dills illie dead in indochina, and many more thousands of American dead, have paid the price of the Administrations's errors and criminal actions unless... Unless Americans -- first an active few, then a great manychange their nercention of the wen and American !

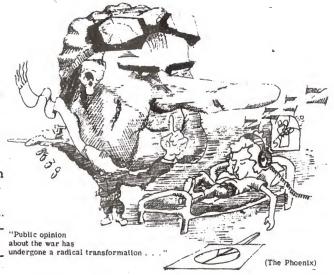
materies to Communist-led forces in etnan. About the same time, if the spoiling operations in Laos and a had seemed seemed particularly, in escaping condemnation of Vietnam ese ground forces and U.S. air might be S. -- the team inst North Viet namese de pots and bases above the DMZ: i.e., a ground invasion of North Vietnam. (The deterrent threat of nuclear is immplicit, as always, amainst Chinese Communist intervention in to a many of these moves, e .g. to the invasion of Laos.) All this to the withdr=wal of U.S. forces"-- i.e., the reduction contimuation of forces dow in to a large, indefinitely sustained level-groun-d combat =

s appearing the roughout these newsletter n taken from Quotations Vietnam: 1945piled by Willia m G. Effr s, Random

eciation is extended to the "Thursday" allowing us to use their Eacilities.

Introdution ICC

inted out in the cartoon, students across been, for the most part, members majority" ilent since the strike protestamb dian inva ion and at ocities at Kent son State. Whe ther through (justified) epression, a sense of futi lity following ars o f protest. preoccupa mtion with person simple ap-athy, young people everyve no t reacted to further secalations of leepe r into Can-bodia and Laos, the jingols to emotion o f the prisonmer-of-war prothe loollownes of the Vie tnamization and the undermanded deception propagat-undergone a radical transformation sider t Nixon's withdrawa | plans. SAC (Science Action Comordinating Comwho imm the past have concerned ourselves erall with the issue of war research at com pelled to stimulate a rethat vital dialog ue between the people of 1 Stat es and the ir governnment. With that n min-d, we hav e gathered some of the orita tive litera ture concerning the War na, recently pumblished or written especius ne wsletter. It is hoped that everyone der the situations described in the followand decide for his or hereself whether to usine—ss as usu—al the next time there is for o rganized rotest aga inst America's ning i nvolvement in Southeast Asia.



"It is impossible to lay down arms until victory is completely won." Richard M. Nixon Vice-President of the United States Hanoi, Vietnam November 4, 1953

A just peace in Vietnam has been, and remains our goal."

Richard M. Nixon President of the United States Washington, D.C. February 18, 1970

dead, have paid the price of the Administrations's errors and criminal actions unless... Unless Americans -- first an active few, then a great manychange their perception of the war, and American impact on the people of Indochina, and the responsibility of citizens of this country, along with its leaders, for that impact... Unless they recognize, and force the Congress and the Administration to acknowledge the moral propositions: that neither the lives we have lost nor the lives we have taken give the U.S. any right whatever to determine by firepower who shall govern or who shall die in Vietnam, Cambodia or Laos; and that the U.S. must stop killing people in Indochina.

Contents:	
ARMY BASIC TRAINING anonymous	3
NIXON & THE PRISONERS OF WAR	
John Van Dyke	3
THE UNITED STATES AND LAOS	U
Noam Chomsky	4
AIR WAR IN LAOS Fred Branfman	6
ECONOMIC AID TO CAMBODIA	U
Fred Branfman	8
CAMBODIA: BITING THE FISHHOOK	O
Jessica Smilowitz, Jeff Pearson	9
OPEN LETTER FROM SAIGON'S	0
JAILED WOMEN	10
THAILAND: SUBCONTRACTING	10
COUNTERINSURGENCY Al McCoy	14
DUC: PROPOSALS FOR PEACE	16
THE VIETNAMIZATION OF SAIGON	-
POLITICS Cynthia Fredrick	18
INTERVIEW WITH A STUDENT DELEGATE	
TO NORTH VIETNAM	22
NATIONAL PEACE ACTION COALITION	24
NEW MOVEMENT FOR PEACE AND	
JUSTICE	24
ASCEPTIC A-BOMB	24
Staff: Frank Carroll	
Susan Dossick	
Melanie Krasnay	٠
Jerry Meldon	
Phil Muldari	
John Rees	
Debbie Rubenzahl	
Ira Rubenzahl	
Marco Seroceno	
Jim Steele	
Science Action Coordinating Committee	
Room 50-316 Extension 1746	
M. I. T. Cambridge, Mass.	1